

PERFORMANCE OF AMERICAN IN-PRINT VENDORS: A COMPARISON AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

MARGARET LANDESMAN

Monographs Order Librarian

CHRISTOPHER GATES

Order Section, Monographs Order Division

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted by the Monographs Order Division of the University of Utah Libraries to compare the performance of three domestic book vendors during the fiscal year 1978-79. The study was designed to measure performance in terms of speed, discount and service, and to compare vendor success in filling orders for easily obtainable trade materials versus more scholarly materials. Results showed considerable variation among vendors with respect to speed, discount and ability to fill the more obscure orders.

The decision to embark on a study of in-print American vendors utilized by the university grew from a perception on the part of the staff that we were expending an undue amount of effort in the acquisition of relatively straightforward, non-ephemeral (though sometimes somewhat obscure), current U.S. imprints. Unsatisfactory reports and vendor cancellations on current scholarly materials raised questions as to whether such orders are best handled by large general library vendors, specialized academic vendors, or by going directly to the publisher.

In addition, like all libraries, we were increasingly feeling the pinch of inflation in tight book budgets and felt the need for a comparative evaluation of our major vendors with regard to pricing as well as to speed and quality of service.

We wanted a study which would allow us to identify, prior to sending orders, those categories of orders likely to cause problems for our vendors and consequently for us, and which would allow us to tie vendor selection to the results of our pre-order searching procedures. The study should also, we felt, ascertain which vendors were cheapest, fastest, and most reliable in filling routine orders for American trade materials.

We decided to use for our sample, orders originating from the query slips supplied by our American approval plan vendor. Such orders comprise a considerable percentage of our current American acquisitions and, since these items are known to exist and have fairly complete and accurate bibliographic descriptions, difficulties in their acquisition should not be such as to require extended correspondence, or, we hoped, direct orders to publishers.

In an effort to separate routine from problematic orders, two criteria were utilized: whether the item could be verified on OCLC, and whether the publisher was listed in *Books in Print* (BIP). It was felt that by separating orders along these guidelines, a truer picture could be obtained of vendor speed and discount as it is not to be expected that discounts and speed of service for more obscure low-discount material will be comparable to that for obvious trade titles.

METHOD

Three vendors were utilized for the study. Baker and Taylor, a large wholesaler catering to both public and academic libraries, supplies us with our approval plan from its Momenca office and firm orders from the Reno warehouse.* Academic Book Center (in Portland) and Taylor-Carlisle (New York) are smaller vendors specializing in the academic market. All three were vendors with whom the library had been dealing for some time and who provided (and continued to provide) a high level of service.

A group of approximately 800 orders was amassed for the study and divided into four groups according to whether the title could be verified in the OCLC data base and whether the publisher of the title was listed in BIP. The majority of the titles, approximately 600, fell into the first group: verified in OCLC and publisher in BIP. One hundred and eight titles were listed in OCLC but the publisher was not in BIP. Forty-six were not in OCLC, but the publisher was listed in BIP, and 38 were neither in OCLC nor was the publisher listed in BIP. Due to the small size of the last two samples, orders in these categories were sent only to Baker and Taylor and Academic Book Center.

All of the orders were mailed on the same day and record sheets were set up to record for each title ordered the date of receipt, list price, net price, postage, service charge, discount, and any cancellations or reports received. Receipts and reports for items in the study were recorded on these sheets for six months and the results then were analyzed in terms of speed of service, price, and quality of service as measured by cancellations, items received, items not reported on and problems.

Results were calculated independently for each of the four categories of orders. The first and most evident result of the survey was that the inclusion of a title in OCLC had relatively little predictive value as to speed of receipt, amount of discount, or whether or not the item would be received. The listing of the publisher in BIP, on the other hand, had considerable predictive value. Hence, in this report, we have consolidated the four categories of orders into two: those with publishers listed in BIP, and those for items from unlisted publishers.

*It might be noted that there seems to be a feeling among some acquisitions librarians that Baker and Taylor's Reno warehouse provides better service than Baker and Taylor's other locations. In addition, Baker and Taylor should have had an edge in this study in that the query slips originated with Baker and Taylor, Momenca.

TABLE 1
DELIVERY RATES FOR TITLES WITH PUBLISHER LISTED IN BIP

Time Period in Days	0-30	31-60	61-90	91-120	121-150	151-180
Baker and Taylor	67 (31.0)	7 (34.2)	56 (60.1)	40 (78.6)	22 (88.8)	8 (92.6)
Academic Book Center	0 (0.0)	2 (1.0)	168 (78.8)	21 (88.5)	2 (89.5)	7 (92.6)
Taylor-Carlisle	8 (4.1)	59 (34.7)	75 (73.6)	9 (78.3)	12 (84.5)	2 (85.5)

SPEED OF DELIVERY

Table 1 shows the number of titles actually received in each time period and the cumulative percentage (in parentheses) of the total order represented for those items with publisher listed in BIP.

Table 2 shows the number of titles actually received and the percentage of the total order this represents for those items whose publisher was not listed in BIP.

All three vendors did well in supplying titles whose publishers listed in BIP. Baker and Taylor, the only one with significant stock, supplied a substantial proportion of the orders within 30 days, something the smaller vendors were unable to do. At 60 days, Taylor-Carlisle had caught up and by 90 days, both of the smaller vendors were somewhat ahead. Thus for speed of delivery, Baker and Taylor is clearly preferable if the book is in stock, but if it must be back-ordered, either smaller vendor is fast. Baker and Taylor has available a microfiche listing of in stock titles which we have recently obtained. This has proved useful for decisions concerning high priority orders, but we have not found it practical to search every order against the in stock listing.

Speed of delivery for publishers who do not list in BIP was slower for all three vendors. Taylor-Carlisle in New York and Academic Book Center did no better than Baker and Taylor. The most disappointing aspect of the study was, however, not the speed of delivery, but the total percentage of orders received. None of the three vendors supplied more than 60% of the orders for items whose publishers were not listed in BIP.

QUALITY OF SERVICE

The most significant factors affecting the quality of service are the percentage of orders satisfactorily supplied (as was previously discussed), the number of orders which are cancelled by the vendor, and the number of orders which the vendor fails to report on. Orders cancelled by vendors

TABLE 2
DELIVERY RATES FOR TITLES WITH PUBLISHER NOT LISTED IN BIP

Time Period in Days	0-30	31-60	61-90	91-120	121-150	151-180
Baker and Taylor	1 (1.8)	2 (5.4)	3 (10.9)	21 (49.1)	4 (56.4)	2 (60.0)
Academic Book Center	0 (0.0)	0 (9.0)	10 (18.2)	6 (29.1)	1 (30.9)	12 (52.7)
Taylor-Carlisle	0 (0.0)	8 (22.2)	7 (41.6)	2 (47.2)	4 (58.3)	0 (58.3)

TABLE 3
VARIABLES REFLECTING VENDOR SERVICE QUALITY

Vendor	Items Received		Items Reported on but Not Received		No Information		Vendor Cancelled	
<u>Publisher Listed in BIP</u>								
Baker and Taylor	200	(92.6)	1	(.5)	13	(6.0)	2	(.9)
Academic Book Center	200	(92.6)	5	(2.3)	8	(3.7)	3	(1.4)
Taylor-Carlisle	165	(85.5)	2	(1.0)	20	(10.4)	6	(3.1)
<u>Publisher Not Listed in BIP</u>								
Baker and Taylor	33	(60.0)	6	(10.9)	8	(14.5)	8	(14.5)
Academic Book Center	29	(52.7)	0	(0.0)	15	(27.3)	11	(20.0)
Taylor-Carlisle	21	(58.3)	0	(0.0)	15	(41.7)	0	(0.0)

must be reordered with another vendor, and those orders on which no information is received must be claimed. Many of the claimed orders also end up as reorders. Both of these procedures consume considerable amounts of staff time. Table 3 summarizes the numbers and percentages of orders causing such problems.

Whether or not the publisher is listed in BIP was again highly predictive of the difficulties the order would encounter. All three vendors cancelled a higher percentage of orders in which the publisher was not listed in BIP, which is understandable, and failed to report on a higher percentage, which is less excusable.

There are other, less tangible aspects in considering quality of service, such as ease in deciphering invoices and reports, acceptability of returning items found to be duplicates, handling of credit memos and availability of a contact in the vendor's operation who can handle problems, questions, and rush phone orders. Problems in these areas can quickly wipe out advantages in speed or discount. While each of our vendors tended to be stronger in some of these areas than in others, all of them provided highly acceptable service. The smaller vendors tend to have some advantages in that there is generally one person who can handle problems and requests of all sorts, whereas in the case of Baker and Taylor, there are six to eight different people in three geographical locations who deal with one aspect or another of our accounts. In the past, lack of communication among these people has caused us serious discontent but the vendor has made efforts to correct this. Though it will never be quite as easy or as pleasant to deal with a large vendor as with a smaller, more academically-oriented one, it is not at present a serious drawback.

DISCOUNT

In looking at the financial advantages of one vendor over another vendor, we have compiled two tables. Table 4 compares the average list and net prices (including postage and service charges) for the two categories of orders for each vendor. This data must be used cautiously, as each vendor did not receive orders for the same titles, which would be the only way to make a really accurate comparison.

Table 5 compares the average discount listed on the invoice with what we have called the

TABLE 4
AVERAGE LIST AND NET PRICES

Vendor	Publisher in BIP		Publisher Not in BIP	
	List	Net	List	Net
Baker and Taylor	15.14	13.76	8.81	8.55
Academic Book Center	15.44	14.78	7.59	8.45
Taylor-Carlisle	16.40	16.28	13.20	14.01

TABLE 5
AVERAGE LISTED DISCOUNT AND AVERAGE EFFECTIVE DISCOUNT

Vendor	Publisher Listed in BIP (%)		Publisher Not Listed in BIP (%)	
	Listed	Effective*	Listed	Effective*
Baker and Taylor	11.870	9.175	3.435	2.95
Academic Book Center	6.875	4.275	1.379	(11.33)**
Taylor-Carlisle	6.242	.732	.476	(6.14)**

*Net price divided by list \times 100.

**Parentheses indicate a negative discount rate.

“effective discount.” The effective discount was computed in order to show the actual rate of discount once postage and service charges, which differ considerably among vendors, were included.

This data must, again, be used somewhat cautiously as the mix of orders may have differed in some way and some of the samples, those for items with publishers not listed in BIP, were relatively small. It seems clear, however, that Baker and Taylor is the least expensive. Both of the smaller vendors, in return for a certain volume of orders, are willing to absorb postage charges. Were we to agree to send more of our orders to these vendors, our effective discount would probably go up considerably.

CONCLUSIONS

All three vendors did an acceptable job of supplying orders for standard trade materials whose publishers list in BIP. Baker and Taylor were the cheapest, and for items in stock, the quickest. None of the three vendors, on the other hand, did a satisfactory job with orders whose publishers are not listed in BIP. At six months, no vendor had filled more than 60% of such orders. We found this result very disappointing. Ordering direct from the publisher might produce better results but has serious drawbacks. More time would be needed to search out publisher addresses and prepare individual orders to publishers and the expense involved in handling additional invoices and writing additional checks is considerable. In addition, many such small orders require prepayment, which constitutes a further burden.

For the most part, we felt that the vendor study was a worthwhile project. Compiling and

analyzing data is a fairly time consuming process and not something we could repeat on a regular basis. Vendor performance is not necessarily stable over an extended period of time, and we are doubtful as to how long our findings will retain their validity.

What did we find out that we did not already know? Our intuitive evaluations of our vendors proved, in some respects, to be incorrect. Our perceptions of general quality of service were largely correct, as were our judgements on relative discounts offered. Our feelings about speed of service and how many orders went unfilled were, on the other hand, largely incorrect. The information on what average price we are paying for current American materials and what discounts we actually receive will be useful.

Given the extent to which the study differed from our preconceptions, and variations in vendor performance over time, access to similar studies on a regular basis would be very useful. At present we do not have such access, but it is something we will keep in mind in considering the eventual adoption of an on-line acquisitions system.